



Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

Supervisor Patricia Jursik, District 8

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TRUTH IN ADVERTISING: GAMES, CLAIMS AND FRAMES **A Review of the Milwaukee County 2016 Budget**

County Executive Chris Abele's 2016 Proposed Budget was widely publicized as a no-tax-increase budget with no cuts in county services. This narrative received little challenge from the news media. Now that the people's representatives – Milwaukee County Supervisors – are finally able to see the bare bones of this budget, it is apparent that under Abele Milwaukee County is taking a significant turn away from its progressive past.

Abele's budget is significantly out of balance in spite of claims to the contrary. The Sheriff's budget, for example, purportedly adds 20 new positions but provides for a zero increase in the tax levy. An unexplained "Cost Abatement" of nearly \$8 million is left without any detail or narrative in the budget document and the elected Sheriff is told to "deal with it" while the elected County Comptroller is told, he "shall have responsibility to ensure that the Sheriff complies with the expenditure authority." In other words: "The County Executive is washing his hands of how this \$8 million hole gets filled."

The County Executive went to Madison and unilaterally offered to put arena financing on the backs of the county property taxpayers. As a result, Shared Revenue from the state, which was flat compared to 2015, will be reduced by another \$4 million to pay this debt service for the arena. These two items alone put the budget \$12 million in the red. The County Executive's game is to claim he is paying for the arena debt with "contingency funds". This is not nor ever has been the reason the Board creates a contingency fund. Generally it is created for unforeseen expenditures that can arise during the year. To add insult to injury, Abele's budget plans only \$5 million for Contingencies in a \$1.37 Billion dollar budget. This is well below prior year Contingencies.

An especially egregious tactic which is now becoming common place in the Abele budgets is the use of the 0.5-cent sales tax to pay for operating expenses. This sales tax was created for the specific purpose of allowing Capital Expenditures for our parks and cultural amenities. The sales tax unfortunately was used under the Scott Walker and Abele administrations for some Operating Costs, but it is obvious that the state legislators with the help of Abele are now forcing the County to divert the sales tax away from maintaining our parks and cultural amenities to pay for ongoing county expenses.

There will be much more to review as we continue our work. In addition to this \$12 million deficit we also have a shortfall of about \$20 million in the pension fund due to the Abele administration's failure to include Cost of Living adjustments in the prior year.

Citizens need to be told the truth about the county budget. Supervisors will do our best to highlight this misinformation that has been hidden behind the hoopla of the County Executive's media spin as he attempted to frame his budget as tax-increase-free.

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